

The benefits of using a travel agent





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A travel agent is a professional travel counselor. Travel agents can provide a wide range of travel advice; arrange transportation; make hotel, motel, and resort reservations; arrange sightseeing and special features such as theater or sports event tickets; prepare itineraries; sell package tours; and provide information on travel needs such as passports, insurance, and baggage identification. And these services, in nearly all instances, don't cost you a dime!

Travel agents keep up-to-date on the ever-changing travel industry by reading trade publications; attending courses, seminars, and meetings; and participating in familiarization tours of various travel destinations to get first-hand knowledge of facilities available to travelers. Agents have access to a wide range of travel reference materials and are trained in the use of these references.

United States Travel Service (USTS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, has designed this brochure to answer frequently asked questions about travel agents and to outline the services they offer to consumers.



How Much Do Travel Agents Charge?

Most services are offered without charge to consumers. An airline, bus or train ticket, hotel reservation, or package tour booked through an agent costs no more than if you made the reservation directly. Agents earn their income through commissions (usually about 7 to 10 percent) paid by the transportation companies, accommodations, car rental firms, cruise lines, and package tour operators with whom they book your reservations.

Some other services, however, may result in a charge to the customer, usually when no commission is offered. A fee may be charged for customized, detailed itinerary planning, for example. Sometimes an agent may pass along to the customer incurred out-of-pocket expenses in the customer's behalf, such as the cost of long-distance phone calls. Ask the travel agent in advance for the amount of any such service charge.

Sometimes a client will consult an agent—have an itinerary mapped out, get hotel recommendations and flight selections—then make his or her own reservations in the mistaken belief that money is being saved. In such cases, some agents feel justified in charging the customer a service fee. Be sure to ask your agent about his or her policy on this.

What Does a Good Travel Agent Offer?

- The convenience of making a single phone call or visit rather than calling numerous transportation companies and hotel chains and picking up tickets all over town yourself.
- The advantage of advice from a person knowledgeable about the travel industry and rapidly-changing travel offerings, such as special fares and rates. Often the agent will have visited the destination in which you're interested and can give you the benefit of firsthand knowledge of the area.
- A veritable supermarket of package tours for cities, resorts, and special interest travel, such as ski



holidays or theater tours. Thousands of such package tours—both escorted and unescorted, and featuring both group and individual travel—promote U.S. destinations. Because the tour operator purchases travel arrangements, such as hotel rooms, in bulk and often takes advantage of special transportation fares, substantial savings are passed along to the individual traveler—you!

- A better chance to recoup payment for services not delivered.
- Suggestions of destinations and vacation opportunities. Do you want to spend your vacation learning to ride a horse, exploring the countryside on cross-country skis, slimming down at a health and beauty spa, exploring a Civil War battlefield, or taking a cruise? Because agents usually have wide travel experience and knowledge of many destinations, they can suggest places where your vacation dreams can be realized.
- Suggestions to help you save money on your trip. Your agent can suggest special transportation fares or passes, recommend a budget-priced package tour, or perhaps inform you of off-season travel bargains.

How Do You Find a Good Agent?

- Get recommendations from friends.
- Shop around. To ask several agents to work out complete mock trips is unfair. But do compare offerings and ask key questions to determine the variety of offerings available from each of several agents. Don't hesitate to set up an interview with an agent you might do business with.
- Ask your local Better Business Bureau (BBB) whether it has received complaints about an agency you are considering.
- Look for an agent who is a member of a professional association.
- Read the travel sections of your local newspaper.

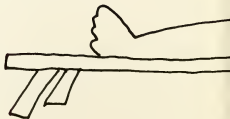
Travel Agents' Associations

There are four major national travel agents' associations in the United States: The American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA), the American Automobile Association's Worldwide Travel Department; the Association of Retail Travel Agents (ARTA), and the Association of Bank Travel Bureaus (ABTB).

Travel agents are not federally licensed or regulated (however some States are now licensing agents). But associations exercise a degree of self-regulation, work to raise the standards of the industry, and help safeguard the traveling public against unethical practices. These associations generally require appointment by at least two major transportation conferences, one of which must be the Air Traffic Conference (ATC) or the International Air Transport Association (IATA). Agents belonging to any of these associations perform the full range of travel advice and booking services for their clients.

With 12,500 members in the United States, ASTA is the largest travel trade organization in the country. The Yellow Pages of your telephone book will indicate those travel agents who are ASTA members, or you can write to ASTA for a list of members in your area. The address is: American Society of Travel Agents, 711 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10022.

The American Automobile Association (AAA) has 900 branch offices in the USA and Canada. About 550 of those offices include travel agencies. Full travel agency services—not just automobile tour planning—are provided by these offices, including air, bus and train reservations, sale of tour packages, cruise arrangements, and hotel and motel reservations. You don't have to be a member of AAA



to use these agencies. However, additional services, such as detailed automobile itinerary planning, are provided solely to AAA members. Look in your telephone book for the location of the nearest AAA office, or write to American Automobile Association, 8111 Gatehouse Road, Falls Church, Virginia 22042.

The Association of Retail Travel Agents (ARTA) has 750 members. Agents who belong to this association participate in an intensive educational program. Also consumer minded, ARTA has a grievance and ethics committee which handles consumer complaints. Consult the Yellow Pages, or write to ARTA, 8 Maple Street, Croton-on-Hudson, New York 10520, for a list of members near you.

Many commercial banks also have fully accredited retail travel agencies. More than a hundred of these agencies are members of the Association of Bank Travel Bureaus. Full travel agency services are offered to the general public, not just to the bank's customers. Inquire at your bank, or look in the telephone directory under "travel agents."

Some agents have the initials "CTC" after their names, indicating that they are Certified Travel Counselors. This designation means that the agent has completed the executive management course offered by the Institute of Certified Travel Agents. Completion of the course usually takes about 2 years, and an agent must have at least 5 years of travel agency experience before receiving the CTC designation. More than 800 travel agents nationwide are now accredited as Certified Travel Counselors, and more than 2,500 are currently taking the course of professional instruction. CTCs in your area can be located by looking under "Certified Travel Counselors" in the Yellow Pages. You can also look for the CTC designation in the telephone directory listing under "travel agents." Or write to the Institute of Certified Travel Agents, 148 Linden Street, Wellesley, Massachusetts 02181.



How To Get the Most from a Travel Agent

A good client usually gets a better vacation, because his or her needs and wishes are communicated to the travel agent. In working with an agent, you should keep several things in mind.

- Have an idea about your destination. Mountains or seashore, city or country, group tour or individual travel, shopping or golfing—basic decisions such as these need to be made before you visit a travel agent. Agents, after all, aren't mind readers.
- Plan in advance. Especially if you plan to travel during a holiday period or peak season, last-minute reservations are difficult to obtain.
- Decide in advance what your vacation budget is. Only you can decide how much money you have available for a vacation trip. Tell your agent what your budget is before you ask him or her to plan an itinerary. The agent can then work within your means and often make your dollars go farther.
- Get involved in your trip. Pick up free brochures from your agent, and read them. Ask questions. Compare different offerings. Learn about the places you're visiting, such as climate, food, and history. (State travel offices can provide this kind of general information as well. See the "For More Information" section of this brochure for details on ordering "Helpful Information Sources," which lists their addresses and phone numbers).

Once Your Trip Plans Are Set

- Pack carefully and properly. Vacations are less enjoyable if you're burdened with excess, unnecessary luggage, or if you've forgotten to pack necessary items.
- Don't forget to take such things as an extra pair of your prescription glasses, an adequate supply of prescribed medication, comfortable walking shoes, your camera and a sufficient supply of film.
- Figure out how you'll pay for trip expenses. Many of the major expenses, such as public transportation costs or package tour arrangements, can be prepaid, reducing the amount of money you'll have to carry with you. Credit cards come in handy while traveling. And travelers' checks remove the risks involved in carrying large amounts of cash.
- Identify your luggage properly. Civil Aeronautics Board regulations now require that all luggage handled by airlines be fully identified with your name and address. But even for other kinds of trips, identification tags help locate stray luggage.
- Cancel routine services such as mail and newspaper delivery, or ask a neighbor to collect these things for you so that your unoccupied house doesn't advertise your absence to burglars. Notify your local police department of your absence, and ask them to keep an eye on your house. Consider purchasing a timer to turn your lights on and off during your vacation. Arrange for pets to be boarded or to be cared for by a neighbor.

The inclusion of companies, organizations and offerings in this brochure does not constitute endorsement, and exclusion does not imply disapproval.

United States Travel Service, the U.S. Department of Commerce agency which is the National government tourism office, welcomes your comments and suggestions. Please write to United States Travel Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C. 20230.

For More Information

Brochures included in the "Consumer's Guide To Travel Information" series are listed below. To obtain a copy of any of the brochures, write to Consumer Information, United States Travel Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C. 20230. ALWAYS SPECIFY THE NAME OF THE BROCHURE YOU WISH TO ORDER.

- ☐ "Tips for an Energy-Wise Vacation"
- ☐ "Getting the Best Value for Your Vacation Dollar"
- ☐ "How To Get an Air Fare Deal"
- ☐ "Helpful Hints for the Older Traveler"
- ☐ "The Benefits of Using a Travel Agent"
- ☐ "Traveling with Pets"
- ☐ "Travel Tips for the Handicapped"
- ☐ "Helpful Information Sources"
- ☐ "Your Rights and Responsibilities: Know Before You Go"

For information about specific vacation destinations, write directly to the State Travel Office(s) in the state(s) you wish to visit.

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